



4

Myths

about

Writing after 50

≡ **Alicia Rasley** ≡

4 Myths about Writing after 50

1. Myth: It's too late.

No, it's not. It might have been too late if you had to be starting at Level 0, but you're not. You're starting with distinct advantages. You have had a lifetime of experiencing story, from your childhood reading to your teen years watching TV shows and your obsession with film. You've been experiencing stories for decades, whether you've been writing them or not. You have absorbed how stories work, how characters work, how authors achieve depth and sympathy.

You have also been writing all along. Sure, it might have been business reports or blog posts or emails. But you've learned to use the English language to your advantage. You know where to look for help and how to check your spelling and typing. You know how to tone down or power up sentences to fit your purpose and audience. You've fixed those recurrent grammar problems that kept you from getting an A in high school.

Most of all, after 50 years of living, you know a lot about people. That understanding of how people work, their psychology, their relationships, gives you an advantage in creating characters and plots. You'll have memories of people acting and reacting to events, and learning or failing to learn from mistakes. You have experiences of your own that taught you lessons that you could use to inspire a character journey. It's not too late... if you start now.



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2. Myth: I don't have anything to say. Really? I bet your friends would disagree. They'd probably tell us you're easy to talk to, and have interesting things to say. And anyway, you don't have to "say something." Telling a story doesn't mean you have to have some great moral lesson or deep wisdom to impart (though story is a great way to do those). It means you're going to invent a world or a set of characters or a series of intriguing events (or all of those). That will give you plenty to say.

Start with a character or an event or even a setting. Build a story. The story will say what you have to say, about life, about meaning, about the world, about whatever issue or experience or relationship inspired the story. We write fiction in order to tell the truths that facts really can't convey, the deeper meanings that go beyond mere reality. Yeah, seriously. I believe that, and you will too, when you plot out that story and show how your characters change because of the plot events. Truth is, you might not know what you have to say until you invent a story to say it with.



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3. Myth: Even if I finish the book, it will take too long to get it published.

Actually, more than ever before, we have control over our own writing/publishing success. It used to take an average of two years from finishing the book to seeing it in the stores-- that is, if you were fortunate enough to get a traditional publishing contract (which was about a 1-in-50 chance for a long time there). Now, while traditional publishing still takes a long time (and the chance of getting into a traditional publisher is hard to calculate), innovative publishing technology means that we can quite literally move from "The End" to getting the book on sale in 24 hours (print or electronic), and for virtually no outlay of cash.

That of course is no guarantee that the book will sell, but there's never been any guarantee of that. At least now, authors are more in control of their fate of their stories and the opportunities for success. And there is plenty of help (free and paid) for promoting and selling your book to readers. Just ask me! There's a large community of "direct publishers" who trade ideas and insights about publishing your own work.



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4. Myth: I'm too old to learn how to write a story, especially how to plot a story. That's not my experience. I have found I was sometimes too YOUNG to write a particular story, but I haven't found I'm too old. And as an over-50 myself, I know I'm not too old to learn. I learn a lot better from mistakes than I did when I was young and impatient and quick to call myself a failure.

I bet this applies to you also. You might find you are more open to learning now that you get to choose what to learn rather than be assigned to it. And you've had a lifetime of learning how you learn best. So now you can better filter through what doesn't work and latch on to what does work. You'll know what you need to find out. If you're over 50, you have no illusion that you need to know everything. You know that you'll figure out what's needed, and you'll know how to find that. (You're also old enough to remember what research was like before Google... and old enough to be know how lucky we are now. :))

You should also know you are not alone. Writers over 50 have had achieved success after having other careers. Bram Stoker had a long career as a theatrical manager before he started writing the seminal vampire story *Dracula*. Laura Ingalls Wilder had several unpleasant jobs before she took up her pen and wrote the chronicle of her childhood in the *Little House on the Prairie*. More recently, Jenny Crusie finished a teaching career before starting to publish NYTimes bestsellers. Now in her 60s, she still has a fountain of ideas not just for [books, but for entire series of books](#).

And let's not forget Helen Hooven Santmeyer, who wasn't published until her late 80s.... See, you have loads of time to learn and grow and write!

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[A recent New Yorker article](#) chronicles the process of a "new writer" who in midlife left a successful law practice to write stories. After a long New York career, he was confident enough (and affluent enough) to travel to a foreign land to do research, and wise enough to make use of the personal encounters with the locals to create his fictional world. Ben Fountain would not have been able to write these stories when he was younger. He needed experience, confidence, and wisdom, and that's what age gave him. Most important, his life and his hard-won knowledge gave him the desire to tell those stories.

Keep that in mind. You have something to say, and you can learn how to say it, and it's not too late. :)



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Story Start Exercise:

Do you have a story in you? Try jotting down answers to these questions to describe it.

1. What is the story you want to tell? Explain as much or as little as you want.
2. What do you love about the story?
3. Where are you in creating this story? Is it just an idea, or do you have a good sense of the character, or some overall plot?
4. What aspect of writing or conceptualizing this story is most fun for you?
5. What aspect of proceeding with the story are you most fearing?
6. What would be your ideal reader, the sort of reader who would really enjoy your story as you do?
7. What do you think is the experience you want the reader to get?
8. What experience in your past can you draw on to help you plot or write this book?

If you're interested in creating stories, whether fictional or memoir, I can help you if you'd like to take my interactive plotting course! Get the plotting out of the way, and you can write the story happily, knowing the main elements of the story:

- Start of the journey
- External and internal conflict
- Reversal and point of no return
- Main turning points
- Climax and resolution

[More information about Alicia's plotting help here.](#)

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About the author:

Alicia Rasley writes novels and teaches other writers how to plot and write novels. She has a graduate degree in literature from Butler University, and teaches college writing at the University of Maryland. She also coaches student writers and novelists through her website, [The Story Journey with Alicia Rasley](#).

Alicia Rasley is a RITA-award winning Regency novelist who has been published by major publishers such as Dell, NAL, and Kensington. Her women's fiction novel *The Year She Fell* has been a Kindle bestseller in the fiction category. *Until Death*, a mystery, was released by Bell Bridge Books. She is also the author of the Writer's Digest book, *The Power of Point of View*, and *The Story Within Plotting Guide*.

If you find this article helpful, you might benefit from the in-depth [6 Weeks to Blueprint Your Plot](#) course. And don't forget to [sign up for my newsletter](#), which will have information about plotting, characterization, and prose, and notices of my upcoming articles and books.

If you're a character-driven writer in search of a plot, or a plot-driven writer in search of characters, this is the course you've been waiting for. [Blueprint Your Plot](#) helps you explore your own story and connect your plot directly to your characters, and vice versa. Using the exercises, you'll be working towards a more vivid and coherent plot, and vital and active characters.

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